Cycling futures

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Book Review
Cycling Futures
Edited by Jennifer Bonham and Marilyn Johnson
University of Adelaide Press, 2016, pp. 472, ISBN 978-1-925261-16-5 (paperback), $66.00
Ebook (pdf) | 978-1-925261-17-2, free

When I was asked to review "Cycling Futures", I considered this a good opportunity to actually read this book instead of only browsing through it. Browsing I had already done with the feeling that I should read at least parts of this book. As a Human Factors/Experimental psychologist in general my focus is on behaviour in traffic, and more specifically on information processing of traffic participants. I have little knowledge of bicycle research in the fields of planning, landscape architecture, urban design, geography, public health, and economics. But we behave in an environment and this environment shapes behaviour, topics that are dealt with in this book. Good reasons to read it and I must say I have no regrets.

Before discussing the contents of the book, it is important to point out that it is slightly confusing that two books with as main title "Cycling Futures" were published the past years. One book has as subtitle "From Research into Practice" and is edited by Regine Gerike and John Parkin. This book was published by Ashgate (now Routledge) in 2015. The present book has no subtitle and was published in 2016 by the University of Adelaide Press. Both books are on the same topic, but there are at least two major differences: the present book has an exclusive focus on Australia and New Zealand, and…. the prices of the books, with the best value for the book edited by Jennifer Bonham and Marilyn Johnson.

Cycling Futures is split into two parts, and Part 1 is called "Current Challenges". Personally I believe the word 'challenge' is overused as euphemism for 'problem', and does not make the problems more pleasant. But in the end it is just a label. Part 2 is about "Strategies for Change".

After the introduction Jim Fitzpatrick gives an insight into Australian cycling history in a really nice way. Remarkable is how widespread and important cycling was around 1900, and how camels created the first smooth cycle paths in Australia. This chapter also illustrates how Australia moved from cycling to motorised traffic, a process that is difficult to reverse as is demonstrated in further chapters in the book. There are good reasons to stimulate cycling, for example health benefits that outweigh the injury risks as shown by Chris Rissel in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 (Epidemiological profile of cycling injury) provides quite detailed information on crash time, characteristics, and speed (Chapter 5), making clear that cycling research and the investment of money in safety measures focused at cyclists are very much needed. In Chapter 6 the economics of cycling are dealt with. What I find striking in most economic models is that these still take the Homo Economicus as starting point, as if we are little calculators weighing all

alternatives. In practice, however, we see that a lot of behaviour is unconscious and more based on habits than on conscious decision making and ratio. Chapter 7 deals with liveability, which is crucial for cycling. No one likes to breathe black clouds of exhaust while cycling. In this chapter Simon Kingham and Paul Tranter make clear that there is a difference between exposure and dose. Exposure is not as bad as one might think, in particular if there is space between the cyclist and motorised traffic. Dose, however, may be a problem, also related to a higher respiration cycle of cyclists. I'm not sure I agree with the somewhat negative view of the authors on things not changing for the better with the introduction of electric vehicles. Indeed, fossil fuel may (still?) be used for the generation of electric energy, but in cities pollution will decrease if electric and hybrid vehicles replace the traditional ones, which should make the air better for cyclist. But I'm aware there are also other issues with electric vehicles, e.g. the fact that electric vehicles are silent and may be detected late. The final chapter of Part 1 is on cycle touring with a lot of space devoted to what cycle tourism is. The adaptation of old (railway) level infrastructure into "railtrails" is interesting and it is good to see that this process takes place all over the world.

Part 2 starts with a chapter on gender and cycling and one on the child cyclist taken as responsible individual. To be honest, as an experimental psychologist this is a sociologal approach with which I have little affinity. For example "Bicycles are not quite the sturdy, stable objects we assume them to be. The taken-for-granted 'materiality' of the bicycle is in continual or ongoing-formation". It just does not relate to what I personally find interesting, but on the positive side: there definitely is something in this book for readers with different backgrounds and interests. Chapter 11 is on road safety campaigns. Australian campaigns used to be good examples of fear appeal campaigns. Dutch campaigns in general make use of humour (note, I'm not saying these are more effective). A mix of the two is also possible. This can be seen in the "Usually, the victim is an innocent. Drive cautiously, save a life!" campaign initiated by The Centre of Consultancy for the Road Victims" where Hitler, Stalin, and Saddam end up on the windscreen. This illustrates a gentle move from shock to humour that now takes place in Australia. Chapter 12 is on what I regard as central for cyclists: space. Glen Koorey gives some nice photographic illustrations of Australasian (bicycle) infrastructure. It is clear that both the infrastructure and expectations of motorised vehicle drivers in New Zealand and Australia are different from those in Europe and in particular the Netherlands. Risk and safety when cycling are obviously different between these continents, and it is interesting to see how these differ and what can and what cannot be copied. What is very true everywhere is that if we want people to ride their bicycle, then from the design stage this should be taken into account. Design must also be such that proper, i.e. safe behaviour, is elicited as natural behaviour, and that the expectations of what and who motorists and cyclists will encounter on the road are realistic. With regard to infrastructure, again space definitely plays one of the most important roles. Chapter 13 by Narelle Haworth is on off-road cycling infrastructure. Do not expect a chapter about off-the-road cycling as in "off road driving", but off road should be taken literally, physically separated from the (main) road. A nice and slightly confusing overview of different facilities is presented. It is confusing as it is not clear whether more or less accidents take place off the road. But this may be due to the many factors that play a role, as Haworth indicates, for example off road infrastructure may stimulate more people to cycle there in general.

In Chapter 14 Geoff Rose gives an overview of university engineering programmes. Conclusion is that no more than 2-4 hours max is spent on cycling programmes, which indicates that there

is a lot of space for improvement. In Chapter 15 Bell and Ferretti discuss what planners should know about cycling. Conclusion is that planning for cyclists is not yet "in the planners system", as the emphasis still is on motorised travel and parking. In the next chapter, after a slow start Hillary Hamnet amply illustrates many of the parking issues. Parking at home, and at end destinations, she even includes useful drawings with dimensions and guidelines. Chapter 17 is a well written chapter making clear the particularities in Australian law (and differences between states/territories) with regard to cycling. Interestingly, consequences that law may have for infrastructure are also dealt with, for example if a minimum passing distance is defined by law then this has consequences for road design. What is remarkable is that in Queensland right now if necessary cars are permitted to cross double unbroken centre lines to pass cyclists safely. Once again this is about making space for cyclists. In the final chapter, Gerrard clearly shows the methodological problems that play a role when evaluating cycle promotion interventions. How can we find out the effect of an intervention, and how can we find out in what way it is effective (or not). Gerrard demonstrates that it is not so easy to quantify effects as evidence, something one might think to be simple at first sight.

The list on p.446 clearly shows that there is a wide range of positive effects of cycling, from often mentioned health effects to enjoyment, and habitat preservation. This book covers many aspects of cycling and should be appealing for an audience who is just as broad: it is warmly recommended for Social Science academics, policy-makers, geographers, public health officials, for students, research associates, and professionals. Actually, there is absolutely no reason not to have a look at this book yourself and to find out how we can stimulate cycling; the electronic version is available for download free of charge. Open access is wonderful.

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